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The Communists Face the Same World

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*One of a series of speeches
delivered at the 1952 Assembly
of the World Christian Mission
held at Toronto, Canada*

DIVISION OF FOREIGN MISSIONS
OF THE

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST
IN THE U. S. A.

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This speech is one of a series delivered at the Division Assembly held at the Royal York Hotel, Toronto, Canada, January 3-6, 1952, by the Division of Foreign Missions of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A. and its related boards in Canada.

Additional copies may be obtained from:

DIVISION OF FOREIGN MISSIONS
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST
IN THE U. S. A.
156 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

BETWEEN the western missionary and his task there stands today one reality, the significance of which he can no longer ignore. That is Communism. Because of it Christian missions can never be the same again. And anyone who still tries to carry on in the same old way might just as well retire from the scene for he will have no relevant word or deed for our day.

Communism represents the greatest single challenge we as Christian missionaries must face today. It is a challenge to serious thought and immediate action for one very obvious reason: One of our largest mission fields is already dominated by it; other areas of the world are in imminent danger of falling under its power; and even where it may not soon gain control it is providing a tremendous stimulus to latent forces of nationalism, anti-imperialism and anti-westernism, in such a way that mission work can never be the same again.

This challenge is obvious. But there is a second that we tend to ignore and which is much more important. Communism has beaten us at our own game of evangelizing the world. It has done so, not primarily by force of arms but by a keener awareness of the human situation, a clearer message and a more dynamic commitment to its cause.

Many times in the past I have repeated complacently in my sermons the words: "Christianity conquered the Roman Empire because the Christians outlived, outthought and outdied the Romans." I no longer say that so glibly. Today the tables seem to be turned. In many instances, the Communists are outliving, outthinking and outdying us Christians.

It seems to me that the Communists, engaged in the evangelization of this same world, have outdone us in certain very specific and significant ways:

1. They have confronted a world lost in meaninglessness with a clearcut comprehensive world view and philosophy of life which can provide the framework for a meaningful existence.

For some years in South America I was baffled by the fact that the most enthusiastic Communists were not the exploited workers but rather the most intelligent and most sensitive intellectuals. But when I began to speak with some of them, I discovered why. They were absolutely lost, looking for some-

thing in which to believe and for which to live, and Communism provided the answer.

In this sense the words of a French communist intellectual are most enlightening:

“Wheresoever we encounter man, that strange animal, whatever be the colour of his skin, whatever the latitude and the climate, we find him absorbed in spite of appearances to the contrary, absorbed, I say, by one single thought, obsessed by one single task and passion: throughout all the vicissitudes of life he keeps asking himself the fundamental question of his destiny: What sort of being am I? What am I doing on earth? What is my *raison d’être*? How am I to explain the ceaseless activity which drives me along? How can I justify those desires which excite me, those anxieties which torment me? Who will give me at last a definition of myself capable of enlightening, appeasing and satisfying me? It is just such a definition of himself, capable of enlightening, appeasing and satisfying him, that Communism professes to bring to men.”

As Carew Hunt has said:

“It is in the last analysis a body of ideas which has filled the vacuum created by the breakdown of organized religion as a result of the increasing secularization of thought during the last three centuries, and it can be combated only by opposing to it a conception of life based on wholly different principles.”

Now Christianity certainly has a world view, a theology, an explanation of what God is doing in the world, that gives meaning and purpose to the lives of individual men and to history.

Yet how tragic has been our failure to present clearly and consistently that complete and comprehensive message in our world mission. Witness our average sermons, all too often presenting Sunday after Sunday isolated fragments of Christian truth; witness, in the face of concentrated Communist indoctrination, the futility of our one-hour-a-week program of Christian education, all too often with second rate materials and untrained teachers. Witness our lack of concern, in our world mission, for theology, for the restatement of our faith for each

generation in a way that will challenge intelligent men and show them their place in God's universe; our almost complete lack of concern for eschatology which alone can show us the nature of our hope and the meaning of history.

We see the passionate commitment of Communists around the world scarcely realizing that they are driven to sacrifice and death because of their "theology," of their world view which gives lasting significance to all their efforts. As John Macmurray has said:

"The Communist lives by faith in a power, which he calls in his own jargon 'the process of history,' which guides and determines the destiny of mankind. As a result he feels himself to be an instrument through which this power is here and now achieving its purpose of creating a true and universal society in the world. His own life is merely a single incident in the process by which this purpose for humanity is being achieved. Therefore he can endure hardship, suffer ignominy and persecution, and even willingly sacrifice his life in the service of this great purpose. . . . He believes, that is to say, in something in the world greater and higher than himself, which works in him and in all human life and in all nature to create a perfected humanity. He believes that men can oppose it or yield their lives to its service. He believes that in spite of, and even through all human opposition, it must eventually triumph, because it is the reality of the world. This belief is not merely a profession of faith. It is an attitude of mind which determines the whole set and direction of the Communist's way of living." (*Creative Society*, p. 23-24)

As I participated recently in the Student Volunteer Conference I was constantly forced to ask myself how many of the students there had a faith as firm as this, capable of thrusting them out into the world with confidence and hope.

If we are to compete with Communism today in the evangelization of the world, here then is the first challenge we must face.

2. Communism has from the very beginning,

maintained the primacy of evangelism, in its missionary thrust.

There is nothing more disturbing to a Christian missionary than the fact that Communism is spreading so rapidly because of the evangelistic zeal of its members. I shall never forget an interview I once had with a woman in Bogota who told me that during the first year after her own conversion to Communism she converted nearly 250 of her fellow students. Nor will I forget the fact that, while I was feebly attempting to get the Presbyterian university students in that same city to begin to think about the evangelization of their fellow students, the Communists won one of the finest students in my own group to their cause.

The Communists have not only been the supreme experts of our day in personal evangelism; they have gone beyond us in using all the media of mass communication, especially drama and literature, to win men to their faith. It is reported that from 1947 to 1949 the Communists in the Orient distributed 90 million copies of one book of basic Communist doctrine, and that during that same period we distributed 25 million Bibles in that same region.

New Christianity must be thoroughly evangelistic by nature. Anyone who has experienced the power of God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ must constantly proclaim that message. Santa Teresa expressed the inevitable drive to evangelism in words which are stirring even in our day:

"I should like to enlighten souls as the prophets and doctors did. I should like to travel over the earth preaching thy name and planting thy Cross on pagan soil, O my Beloved. But one mission would not satisfy me; I should like at the same time to announce the Gospel in all parts of the world and even in the remotest islands; I should like to be a missionary, not merely for a few years, but I wish I could have been one since the creation of the world and continue until the end of time."

How many of us Christian missionaries of this generation feel this same urgency to evangelize the world? Our mission work is not even remotely geared to the primacy of evangelism in many fields.

Not only have institutions and administrative responsibilities come to absorb most missionary efforts, but in many places the institutional mentality has created an atmosphere which is decidedly unfavorable to the evangelistic emphasis. I recall one mission field of extreme urgency in which ten years ago, out of a staff of 40 missionaries, one man 60 years of age was given about half-time to evangelistic work.

And while this happens in Protestant *mission* organizations, exclusively dedicated to the world mission of the church, a Communist leader in the Philippines uses the words and example of Jesus as a stimulus to those under him to be fervently active in the conversion of their fellowmen to Communism.

3. Communism has achieved such tremendous power because it has united theory and action, a total world view with a clearcut program of social change. By and large we Protestant missionaries have accepted a false and fatal dichotomy between theology and ethics, between what God has done for us in Christ and what He wants to do through us in the world.

We sometimes say that the power of Communism lies in the fact that Communism is a religious faith. That is a half-truth. Its power lies in its being a faith which offers a hope of changing the structures and institutions of life. Therein lies its appeal. As a biographer of Lenin has said:

“Unlike the men of action of previous history, action in him was not dissociated from theoretical knowledge. His political career is explained without omission in his written work. Every one of his acts sprang from a knowledge that was organically related to theory. . . . The complete harmony between action and understanding which we find in Lenin is the first announcement of a new age, the age of Socialism whose main characteristic will be the absolute transparency of its activity to the light of its own understanding.”

Our separation of theology and ethics has been fatal in our missionary enterprise. On the one hand we have had a concern for the ethical problem, the so called social gospel, without a theology, and therefore, without a criterion of truth nor a basis for

dynamic action. On the other hand, we have had a theology totally divorced from the supreme problems of men and life, concerned with certain legalistic norms of relatively little significance. The result has been that a sensitive soul, concerned about the injustice and suffering of the world, was not willing even to give Christianity a hearing for he saw it as unconcerned with the crying and urgent needs of men. I remember the words of a young Colombian student who abandoned the church for the Communist party. This was the reason he gave: "You Protestants are concerned that people don't smoke or drink; the Communist is concerned about human suffering and injustice."

If we as Christian missionaries hope to speak a relevant word on those frontiers where Communism is strong, we must have a vital faith which will provide a motive for concern about social injustice and a dynamic for social action, a theology which will force Christians to become involved in all areas of social, economic and political life with a passionate desire to bring them under the Lordship of Christ.

Communism has succeeded in developing among its adherents a sense of commitment to its cause and a willingness to sacrifice which must perturb our conscience. The burning heart in the outstretched hand might become today the symbol, not so much of Calvinism, as of Communism.

Pere Ducatillon, the distinguished Roman Catholic student of Marxism, has said:

"Communism is a phenomenon of passion, one of the most formidable not only in our time, but also, without doubt, of history."

That passion was evident in Marx and Lenin. It also dominates the lives of millions of young Communists today. A group of 408 graduates of Tsinghua University, most of them students of engineering, wrote these words to Mao Tse Tung on the day of their graduation:

Our Revered and Beloved Chairman Mao: It has long been our fond hope to follow your blueprint of a New China and contribute our share to the realization of the people's bright future. . . . The day has come; how happy we are! We

want you to know that we have been studying and preparing ourselves for our glorious tasks. The masses of students are saying, "We are prepared to devote ourselves unreservedly to the People's great cause. Behold, new China is ours today." Can there therefore be room for the consideration of personal interests and difficulties?

So in the past year we have looked upon our studies as a duty imposed upon us by the people. We understood them with great political enthusiasm. We formed, on a voluntary basis many study sections. We asked many members of the teaching staff to advise and help us. Our teachers were moved. Such enthusiasm for learning, they said, was never known before liberation.

Our enthusiasm burns like fire. . . . We are thrilled by the prospect of reconstructing our mother country.

Much more could be said about these and other points of reflection raised by Communism. But the challenge is clear. What then can we do about it?

Speaking recently on this subject before a group of missionaries, I was accused of painting too dark a picture, of leaving them in despair rather than inspiring them to action. I believe the picture is very dark indeed. Nothing will be accomplished by refusing to face it. We must see clearly our weakness and involvement; we must wait upon the Lord in real repentance and humility. We may have to descend to the bottom of the pit if we expect to be able to see the stars above.

But as Christians we cannot despair. We have failed, but God has not. He is the sovereign Lord and cannot be defeated. He is working in the world and in his church to do his will and bring in his Kingdom.

It seems to me that our problem is not primarily that of trying to know what we should do. That is clear. In the face of Communism we must speed up our program of indigenization; we must make our evangelistic emphasis primarily in reality; we must seriously reconsider the relationship of our church on the mission field to the social order and social problems and do something about it.

But that is nothing new. As Dr. Charles Ranson

has stated in his recent article in *The Christian Century* regarding the "Lessons of China:" "I confess that I have been unable to discover in all these documents a single insight regarding missionary policy and practices which has not been repeatedly advocated during the past 20 years."

We have failed persistently to implement these insights. Our failure has been a failure of the will.

This fact, however, it seems to me, must be the beginning and not the end for us as Christian missionaries. Somehow a means must be found of re-educating the mind and strengthening the will at this very moment.

The hope that this is possible was born in me during my participation in the Study Fellowship on Communism. As a result of that experience I am convinced that we have stumbled upon a method of short term preparation of missionaries which may help us to respond creatively to the challenge which Communism presents. I therefore beg your permission to refer briefly to that experience.

Last January twenty of us got together in New York City. Most of us were just ordinary missionaries who had gone about our work, for longer or shorter periods of time, in the accustomed way. We came together as a group united in a common purpose. For the first time in our lives we asked ourselves and each other: What is really going on in this world today? And what are we as Christian missionaries called upon to do in the face of this situation?

We took a certain number of very excellent courses. But that was not the most significant thing. Had our work stopped there we would have returned to the field simply a bit more informed about the problems of our day. But in addition to our courses, we lived together as an intimate fellowship. We spent six hours a week in worship and discussion attempting to discover our responsibility. We began our course with a retreat and ended it with another, in which we sought the spiritual resources necessary for our task. And when our group broke up we had arrived at certain definite conclusions regarding our life and work as missionaries to which we had committed ourselves individually and as a group.

The results of this effort have convinced me that we have here something with which we might experiment *now* as we face the challenge before us. I would suggest that this method of intensive study and discussion in fellowship might be used on two different levels:

First of all, in the training of new missionaries. I believe it is a crime to send new missionaries to the field today without preparing them for what they must face. As Americans they represent (in the mind of peoples of the East) reaction in a revolutionary world, and are unable to understand what is happening around them or to speak or act relevantly in relation to it. They go as servants of a younger church in which they will not be leaders. Nothing in their American background has prepared them for that. And they go to areas of the world where life is very insecure and where the necessity of closer identification with those among whom they will live demands sacrifices of which they have never dreamed.

To prepare people for this new missionary task in a revolutionary world, our program of a few courses on missions in the average seminary is woefully inadequate. We must begin immediately to make bold new ventures in this field. When we resolve to do so, it may be that the general pattern of the study fellowship, a short-term program of intense study combined with discussion, fellowship and worship, may help to provide an answer.

Secondly, and of more urgency, is the problem of re-educating the minds and strengthening the will of those now in service on the field. Communism demands of us nothing less than the complete reconsideration of our missionary program now. Here too I believe that the pattern we have mentioned above might serve as a basis for experimentation. Whether we think in terms of special study fellowships for missionaries on furlough or a series of conferences on the field, we must find means of bringing together our missionaries and giving them an opportunity to face the facts and the challenge of this moment.

Communism today threatens the very existence and integrity of the Christian missionary movement. As we face it we should do so not with fear but

with courage. We should recognize the hand of God in it, judging our failures and challenging us to new creative thought and action on those frontiers where His power is breaking through today. Let us thank God for this opportunity and allow Him to use us as He wills in this hour.